

# Newark

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Mayor

Landmarks and Historic Preservation Commission  
c/o Division of City Planning

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Chairperson

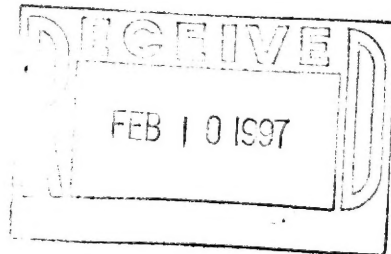
Harry L. Hines, P.P.  
Secretary

To: Synthia James  
Planning Board  
From: Elizabeth Del Tufo

Please find resolution to be voted on by the Planning Board.

I am also enclosing portions of ordinance pertinent to addition of properties to the City Register of Historic Places.

Thank you.



*To: Ade Abolahi  
Synthia James  
2/10/97*

**Report to the Planning Board of the City of Newark  
Recommending Designation of Riverbank Park  
as an Historic Site**

On Tuesday, 4 February, the Newark Preservation and Landmarks Commission voted unanimously to recommend that Riverbank Park be designated as historic, and as such included in the Zoning Map, Historic Registry and the Historic Preservation Element of the Master Plan of the City of Newark.

The Newark Landmarks and Historic Preservation Commission was established in 1994 to protect, enhance, perpetuate and use improvements and landscape features of special character, historical or aesthetic interest.

Over the past few decades, a renewed appreciation of Olmsted parks has increased our awareness of landscape architecture as a work of art, in which every element has been considered and placed with an intention and relationship to an overall design. Thus, as with any work of art, one cannot change even a small part without affecting the whole. Essex County has a park system designed by this country's most important landscape architects, and that was under their continuous design control for nearly half a century.

Riverbank Park was constructed over a period of time, beginning with a six-acre portion that was built between 1907 and 1910. This original plan was almost doubled in size in the late twenties, culminating in 1931. The park is practically completely intact from this period, with few intrusions or loss of original elements. It is the smallest county park, at 10.77 acres. It is one of two Essex County parks in the Newark's Ironbound neighborhood.

Newark's historic preservation ordinance establishes four criteria to be used in determining whether or not to recommend historic designation; these are the same as the criteria used for state and federal designation. It is the conclusion of the Commission that Riverbank Park clearly meets three of these criteria (as in the state and federal level, fulfilling one criterion alone is sufficient to merit designation)

**Criterion One: Riverbank Park is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.**

Specifically, Riverbank Park is:

- an expression of the City Beautiful Movement; and,
- the result of increasing public awareness of social welfare and the public's responsibility to provide recreational amenities for all its citizens; and,
- made possible by the changing nature of industry and transportation at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

The City Beautiful Movement

Spurred on by the powerful vision embodied in the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, cities across the United States embarked on large-scale urban planning and rebuilding projects; this is known as the City Beautiful Movement. Newark's City Hall, Public Library

and County Court House are all products of the movement. Likewise, the creation of the Essex County Park Commission in 1894 was an early and major reflection of this movement.

Realizing that the relatively small area of Newark and its surrounding municipalities made comprehensive and large-scale landscape planning difficult, public-minded local citizens realized that comprehensive and large-scale planning could be better achieved on a county-wide scale.

The Essex County Park System that resulted is the first and oldest county park system in the United States. Consistent with the comprehensive vision of the City Beautiful Movement, the Essex County Park System was designed as a master plan encompassing small urban parks, larger scenic parks within the city, and suburban reservations, all linked by county parkways. Riverbank Park is an outstanding example of the small, urban park, an important and under-recognized component of the Essex County Park System (see discussion of Olmsted firm under Criterion Three).

#### Increasing Public Awareness of Social Welfare

The City Beautiful Movement also advocated the use of the most modern and scientific methods to address the social needs of city dwellers, particularly those in dense urban centers.

Like Andrew Carnegie, Franklin Murphy is an emblematic local representative of the successful late nineteenth century industrialist who became increasingly concerned with issues of social welfare, and was a major force behind the establishment of Riverbank Park.

Murphy's prominence and fortune came from his varnish factory in the Ironbound, one of Newark's major industries of the period. He had served as the Governor of the State of New Jersey, and founded the Newark YMCA. He was also founding member of the Essex County Park Commission and its president during its early years. He took a particular interest in a park which would serve many of his factory's employees. In the 1910 Essex County Park Commission Annual Report he states:

"...although it is the smallest of the twelve parks, even in its unfinished state, one of the most largely used and is an excellent example of the wisdom and importance of locating breathing spaces in thickly settled portions of the community."

#### The Changing Nature of Industry and Transportation

The land currently occupied by Riverbank Park was once a vital center of Newark's industrial activity during the early nineteenth century. The park was built on lands that once housed the Edward Balbach and Sons Newark Smelting and Refining Works, one of the city's major industries, as well as the Morris Canal.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the river and canal had been replaced by rail, and industries that flanked these outmoded means of transportation were relocated, particularly those which depended on coal supplied along the Morris Canal route. Furthermore, as the city grew, certain noxious enterprises became less tolerable so close to the expanding downtown.

The 1926 Report of the Park Commission to Essex County records the issuing of \$400,000 in County bonds to acquire additional parkland and facilities in Riverbank Park, "where undeveloped vacant spaces can be utilized before appropriation to dwelling and commercial purposes."

The park was nearly doubled in size, including land bordering the Passaic River in front of the Park. The City Subway and Raymond Boulevard was constructed along the Morris Canal, and the same right of way that once served canal boats bringing iron ore and coal from the hills of New Jersey and Pennsylvania, now conducted automobile and light rail traffic through the city of Newark.

By 1927, the Commissioners could report:

"...the riverfront development, as planned, will form an attractive addition to the park. It will provide access to the River and facilities that will enable the people of the district to enjoy all the pleasure that a riverside park can offer. In addition, a touch of landscape beauty will be added to one of the main highways leading into the City of Newark."

**Criterion Three: Riverbank Park embodies distinctive characteristics that represents the work of a master, and possesses high artistic value.**

Riverbank Park was designed by Olmsted Brothers, heirs to the firm of Olmsted and Vaux, the designers of Central Park, New York, and Prospect Park, Brooklyn. The Olmsteds are unquestionably the most important influence in American landscape design of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. proposed a "Central Park for Newark" as early as 1868; and participated in the earliest design stages of the Essex County Park System from 1890 to 1895.

Olmsted Brothers continued and expanded upon their father's tradition with over a thousand public and private landscape commissions. The firm was responsible for widely disseminating and perpetuating the Olmstedian tradition of naturalistic landscape design, as well as adapting the vision of the founding partners to the twentieth century.

Olmsted Brothers was formally and continuously associated with the Essex County Park System from 1898 to at least 1942; thus, the parks designed and built during this period--virtually the entire system--exhibit an unusual degree of coherent planning and continuity of vision. Furthermore, the Essex County Park System is among their more extensive projects, comparable to the firm's work in Boston and Chicago.

In the context of the entire Essex County Park System, the history of Riverbank Park takes on added significance. Its designers, the Olmsted Brothers firm, responded to the growing role of active recreation in a small urban park at the same time that scenic parks were designed for more suburban settings, and land still remote from development was being set aside in the form of reservations. It represents the stated desire its designers for a variety of park lands to meet the varied needs of park users. Thus, Riverbank Park provides an important addition to the work Olmsted Brothers firm, and challenges the widely-held notion of the Olmstedian tradition as strictly naturalistic.

In a 1892 letter, Frederick Law Olmsted Sr. describes how he designed parks to provide settings for people of all classes. Towards this end, he developed three different kinds of green spaces. The size, the activities and the treatment of nature distinguish the three types.

The smallest green spaces contain traditional outdoor activities and sites for newly developed recreations such as field games, athletic exercises, parades, open-air concerts, etc. He proposed that every neighborhood have several of these small parks, and that their recreational facilities be placed in formalized natural settings.

In the 1901 Report to the Commission, the Olmsted firm refers to establishing this same type of small local park as part of the Essex County Park System. Riverbank Park is an outstanding example of this type, with all the qualities Olmsted describes, as well as characteristics that are typical of the work of the firm.

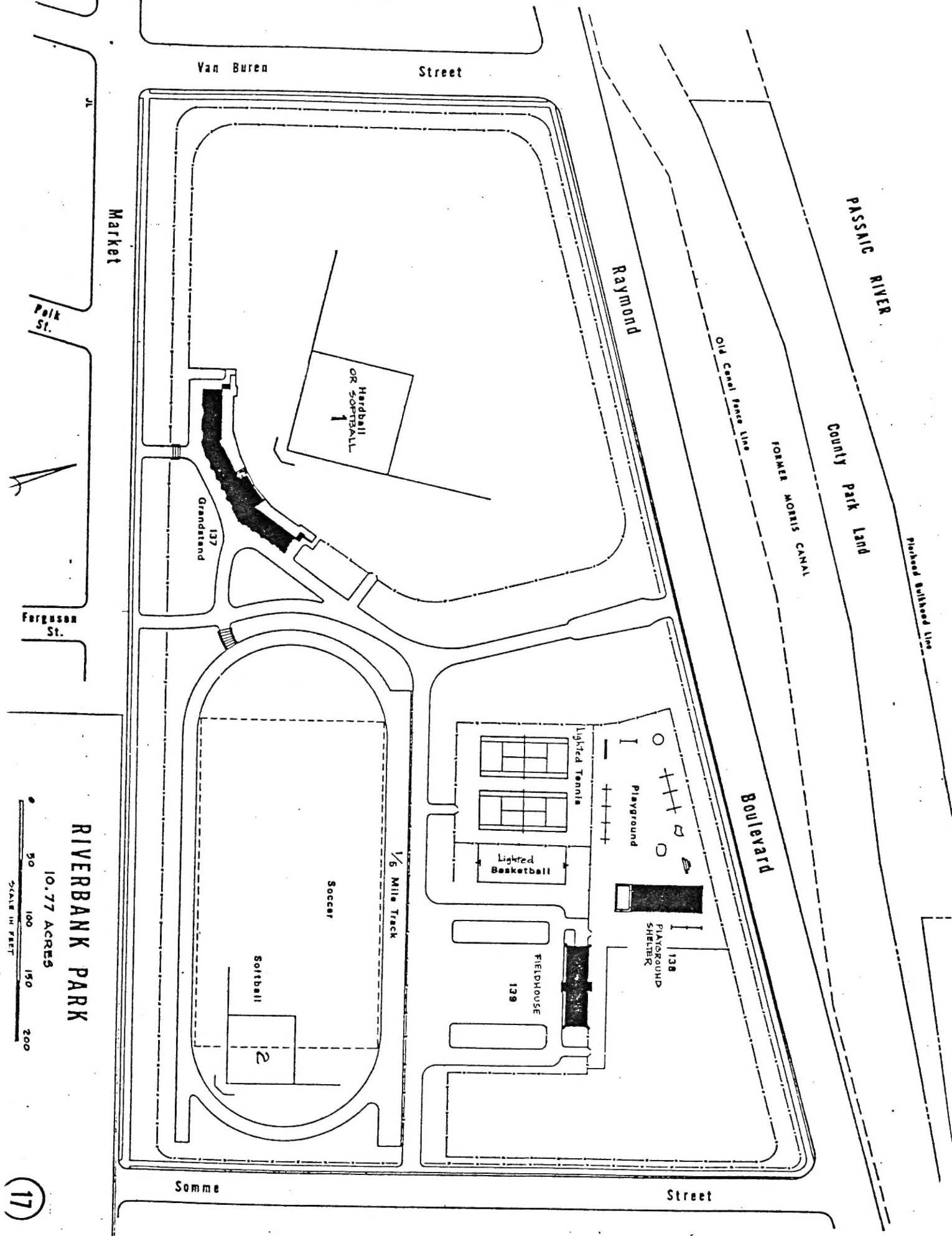
In a very small area, Riverbank Park contains a baseball field and grandstand, a football/soccer field and 1/5 mile track, tennis courts, playground, shelter and field house, as well as naturalistic paths and plantings. Formal rows of sycamores border the park, and provide a transition from the regular geometry of the street grid to the green space. A naturalistically designed area with curvilinear paths and informal plantings of mature, specimen trees and shrubs in the middle of the park screen both the sights and sounds of the major recreational spaces from each other, as well as providing appropriate access to the similarly treated scenic portion of the park along the Passaic River. Changes in grand and more formal plantings further subdivided the recreational areas.

Riverbank Park also contains notable architecture: the brick and stone grandstand has elaborate iron truss work which skillfully meets both functional and decorative requirements; the shelter is a handsome and well-proportioned structure with a massive tile roof and lead down spouts.

**Criterion Four: Riverbank Park has yielded, and is likely to yield, information important in history.**

A portion of the Morris Canal runs through Riverbank Park, just to the north of Raymond Boulevard; the towpath was located on the riverside of the canal. This area is on the National Register of Historic Places, as is the canal's entire length. According to the report on the Joseph G. Minish Passaic River Waterfront Park and Historic Area by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, there is a high potential for subsurface remains to survive in this area. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Environmental Assessment and 404 (b)(1) evaluation also identified this as an "archeological site of significance."

On the basis of these findings, the Newark Landmarks and Historic Preservation Commission recommends that Riverbank Park be designated as an historic site.



PASSAIC RIVER

County Park Land

FORMER MORRIS CANAL

Old Canal Fence Line

planned railroad line

Boulevard

Raymond

Street

Van Buren

Market

Polk St.

Ferguson St.

Street

Somme

# RIVERBANK PARK

10.77 ACRES



No. 654FEPage - 4 -Date AUG 03 1994

"Restoration" means the act or process of accurately recovering the form and details of an improvement by the removal of later work and/or by the reconstruction of missing earlier work.

"Stabilization" means the act or process of applying measures designed to reestablish a weather-resistant enclosure and the structural stability of an unsafe or deteriorated building, object, site, structure or landscape feature while maintaining the essential form as it exists at present.

"Structure" means a combination of materials to form a construction for occupancy, use or ornamentation whether installed on, above, or below the surface of a parcel of land. Structure includes, but is not limited to, buildings, signs, fences, tanks, towers, poles, walkways, driveways, streets and roads.

## DESIGNATION OF HISTORIC DISTRICTS AND SITES

### 27:9-3 Criteria for Designation

a. As stated in the U.S. Department of the Interior's National Register Criteria for Evaluation, promulgated pursuant to 16 U.S.C.A. Sec. 470a, the following criteria shall be used by the Commission for its review for designation of historic sites, buildings and districts: the quality of significance in national, state or municipal history, architecture, archaeology, and culture if present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feelings, and association, and:

1. That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or

2. That are associated with the lives of persons significant in the past; or

3. That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or

4. That has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

b. Ordinarily cemeteries, birthplaces, or graves of historical figures, properties owned by religious institutions or used for religious purposes, structures that have been moved from their original locations, reconstructed historic building, s properties primarily commemorative in nature, and properties that have achieved significance with the past 50 years shall not be considered eligible for nomination; however, such properties will qualify if they are integral parts of districts that do meet the criteria or if they fall within the following categories:

1. A religious property deriving primary significance from architectural or artistic distinction or historical importance; or



No. 6SAFEPage 5

AUG 03 1994

2. A building or structure removed from its original location but which is significant primarily for architectural value, or which is the surviving structure most importantly associated with a historic person or event; or

3. A birthplace or grave of a historical figure of outstanding importance if there is not other appropriate building, structure or site directly associated with his or her productive life; or

4. A cemetery which derives its primary significance from graves of persons of transcendent importance, from distinctive design features, or from association with historic events; or

5. A reconstructed building when accurately executed in a suitable environment and presented in a dignified manner as part of a restoration master plan, and when no other building or structure with the same association has survived; or

6. A property primarily commemorative in intent if design, age, tradition, or symbolic value has invested it with its own historical significance; or

7. A property achieving significance within the past 50 years if it is of exceptional importance.

#### 27:9-4 Procedures of Designation

a. The Commission may make studies and surveys of sites, buildings and districts in order to determine if same meets the criteria set forth herein for designation as historic sites or historic districts.

b. An application for designation shall be submitted to the Commission for review and recommendation before its submission to the Municipal Council by the Planning Board, Business Administrator or his designee.

c. No historic building, structure, site or district shall be so designated on the zoning map of the City of Newark without first being reviewed by the Commission. The recommendation of the Commission shall be secured in accordance with the provisions herein.

d. All applications shall be submitted in a form provided by the Commission including, but not limited to, the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form.

1. Applications for designation of historic sites and historic districts shall be submitted to the Administrative Officer, who will review the application for completeness.

2. The completed applications shall be presented to the Commission at its first meeting following receipt of the application. After having reviewed all documents relating thereto, the Commission shall determine whether or not the application should be accepted for its review.

3. At the same meeting, the Commission shall set a date for a public hearing (which may be a regularly scheduled meeting of the Commission) on all requests which have been accepted for review.



No. 65+FE

Page -6-

Date AUG 03 1994

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4. At least fifteen (15) days prior to the public hearing, public notice by publication in the official newspaper shall be given notifying interested parties that the site or district has been nominated for designation. Said notice shall include information as to where and when the application may be reviewed, as well as information regarding the consequences of the proposed designation and the opportunity to be heard regarding such designation.

5. At the scheduled public hearing, the Commission shall afford a reasonable opportunity for the presentation of facts and the expression of views by responsible persons and/or interested parties, and may take the testimony of witnesses and receive evidence.

6. After full consideration of the evidence brought forth at the hearing, the Commission shall make a recommendation and issue a report recommending designation or non-designation of historic site or historic district to the planning board. Thereafter, the Planning Board shall review the Commission's report and shall issue a final report recommending designation or non-designation of the historic site or district on the zoning map of the City of Newark to the Business Administrator for submission to the Municipal Council.

7. The Planning Board's recommendation shall include the following information:

i. An explanation of the significance or lack of significance, integrity of lack of integrity of the nominated site or district as it relates to the criteria for designation.

ii. The relationship on the nominated site or district to the ongoing efforts by the Commission to identify and nominate all potential areas, sites, structures and building that meet the criteria for designation.

iii. A map showing the location of the nominated site or district and the boundaries of same.

8. A copy of said report shall be available for inspection by any interested party and the Planning Board shall publish in the official newspaper a notice of its decision.

9. If the recommendation of the Planning Board is that the proposed site or district not be designated in the ordinance, any new nomination for the same property or district should be based upon a showing of substantial information.

e. Upon favorable action by the Municipal Council, the nominated historic site or district shall be designated on the Zoning Map of the City of Newark and the Planning Board shall list it in the City's Historic Registry.

#### 27:9-5 Uses of Designated Properties

a. Nothing contained herein shall affect the present legal use of the designated property.

b. Use classifications and bulk restrictions as to all such property shall continue to be governed by the general zoning ordinance of the City of Newark and the procedures established therein.